

Two Poets of the Peasantry

57

Euphrosyne, Aglaia, fair Thalia,
With eyes that glance such looks of
loveliness
As loose man's limbs. So fair their glances
are.

Only the danger of writing about the Greek
sense of
beauty is that readers come to picture them
as a nation of
aesthetes, devoting their lives to Art for
Art's sake and
floating about draped with white sheets, in
the intervals
of preciously inscribing on waxen tablets a
few phrases
of ekborately simple maundering. But they
were not
aesthetes. They cared passionately about
conduct. They
lived lives of tireless activity. They would
have thought
Wordsworth a *faineant*. One must stand on
the hill of
Athens and look westward across the
Saronic Gulf to the
horn of Aegina and, beyond it, the couchant
lion of the
Acrocorinth, and north, again, to Mount
Parnes, the
frontier of Boeotia, to realise how these
people spent
every hour of their existences with their
ancient enemies
looking straight into the very doors of their
homes. It
was as if Berlin were visible from
Montmartre, It was
only in Alexandria that Greece bred her first
bookworms.
In the Greek ideal of active life grace,
goodness, and
intelligence went, like the three Graces,
hand in hand.
And so it does not seem incongruous to
Hesiod to link
here in the same line:

Grave Themis, Aphrodite dancing-eyed,
And Hebe crowned with gold.

Justice, Love, Youth—however different, all
three are

divine. This was the triumph of their sanity.
No doubt
it was only an ideal and they were only
human; no doubt
there are dark enough blots on their
history. But at least
it was their ideal; and precisely the interest
to us of a poet
like the author of the *Works and Days* lies in
seeing how
even these hands grown horny on the
plough, cunning
and grasping sometimes with the hard
shrewdness of a